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The hills of western Massachusetts

Chapter 61 Amended, by Jennifer Fish

During the last weeks of December, an amendment to the Chapter 61 law was passed by the legislation and approved. These changes become effective on March 22nd 2007 with taxation changes effective January 1, 2008.

The aim of the amendment is to make the Chapter programs more simple and landowner-friendly in order to increase classification of forestland and extend the length of participation in the programs.

Among other things the amendment provides for:

- Elimination of the 8% stumpage tax and DCR filing fee for Ch61 land
- Landowners to switch enrollment in the programs Ch61, Ch61A, Ch61B) without penalty
- Removes the assessors ability to reject a forest management plan and have DCR service foresters determine whether the land's management meets silvicultural standards
- Requires that Ch61 taxes are based on the value of forest land as determined by the Farm Land Value Advisory Commission, as now exists under Ch61A
- A uniform penalty/repayment for all three chapters when enrolled

land is developed. Requires that, in order to develop a parcel, the landowner make repayment of the most recent five years of deferred tax with 5% interest or a conveyance tax (as currently required under Ch61A), but not both. Existing Ch61A parcels would be grandfathered at 0% interest for withdrawals

- A uniform set of language for all chapters concerning a town's right of first refusal by defining what qualifies as a bona fide offer, setting a process for fairly determining the value of land and providing clear deadlines for the right of first refusal
- Limiting rollback taxes to changes of use not consistent with any of the chapters. Withdrawal from current use without a change in actual use will not result in a rollback penalty if the use remains unchanged for 5 years

The amendment was supported by The Massachusetts Forestry Association, Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, The Trustees of Reservations and the Massachusetts Assessors Association among others.

For more information go to <http://masswoods.net/>

Landowner Highlight

Meet the Terrys, by Jennifer Fish

Along the Massachusetts turnpike in western Hampden County where the trees seem to stretch on forever, is the tree farm of Howard and Judith Terry. Previously owned by a man from Connecticut, it was put on the market after the gentleman's children were not interested in keeping the land. The Terry's, a retired couple with grown children of their own, point out that this is an increasingly common problem, as our population ages the next generation may not be interested in owning or be able afford to own the land.



In the mid-1990's Howard Terry was looking to buy property around 100 acres to hunt on in Vermont when he got a call about a 577 acre piece of land in Blandford. "In Massachusetts?" Terry said, "I didn't think there were properties of that size in Massachusetts." After visiting property with his wife, Judith, they decided it was for them. "There were turkey and deer sign everywhere," Howard said with a twinkle in his eye.

The property also came with about 40 acres of Christmas trees that according to Judith varied from 5 to 20 feet tall "And there was a lot of hardwood in growth", she said. They spent the next 11 years learning about the Christmas tree business and bringing the fields back. They now have bustling Christmas tree business augmented by bows and wreaths made by Judith.

They have also been active with the management of their forest. They enrolled their land in Chapter 61A in 1994 to reduce their taxes. In the face of an eminent threat from the hemlock woolly adelgid, the Terrys had their first timber sale in 1999, which removed a large percentage of low quality hemlock. According to Howard the area has come back mainly to hardwoods. He has also supplemented the regeneration with blight resistant American Chestnuts.

When asked how they would encourage others to get involved in their land or community they said how important it is to get on other organization's mailing lists "so you find out what's going on" says Judith. They encourage joining organizations or town boards and participate by attending meetings. They also gave high praise to the Coverts program as well as Massachusetts State Agencies specifically the Service Forestry Program and UMass Extension.

Who is your Service Forester?



Tom Ryan's territory covers the southern Highlands including the town of Blandford. Tom first met the Terry's in 2005 soon after becoming a Service Forester. He took a drive with Howard to look at some timber stand improvement work that had been done as part of the Forest Stewardship Cost Sharing program. Howard proudly showed off his American Chestnut trees. Tom has also helped the Terry's find out about the quality of the soil in their Christmas tree plantations and he has put them in touch with a forest health specialist. "Information and assistance we receive from the service forestry program as well as most of the state programs has been invaluable" say the Terry's. According to Tom technical assistance to landowners is one aspect of his job that he enjoys the most.

To find out who your Service Forester is go to:

<http://masswoods.net/sustainability/index.html>

or call 1 800-783-2311

Forest Industry in Massachusetts

Where Does Our Wood Go? by Joe Smith

The Massachusetts logging industry is responsible for the annual harvest of over 130 million board feet and 500,000 cords from the state's forests. On the stump this wood has a value of almost \$24 million. As this wood proceeds through the manufacturing cycle it adds valuable jobs and revenue to the state's economy, increasing its value ten-fold once removed from the forest. It is difficult to place an accurate figure on this value because a lot of the wood grown here is processed in other states or countries, and much of the wood used in manufacturing here was grown elsewhere.

A significant portion of the wood harvested in Massachusetts leaves the state as unprocessed logs. This is related to a rapid decline in the number of sawmills operating in the state. According to the 2006 Massachusetts Directory of Sawmills & Dry Kilns, there are currently 32 stationary sawmills operating in the state, producing approximately 42 million board feet of lumber annually, compared to 97 mills producing over 100 million board feet reported in 1993.

As a state we consume over 1.5 billion board feet of wood products annually in the form of lumber (750 million board feet), pulp products (450 million), Fuelwood (225 million), and plywood or veneer (100 million). The large gap between local consumption and production means that there is the potential for increasing the volume of wood that is grown, harvested, and manufactured locally. There are efforts ongoing, such as the North Quabbin Woods Project and the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative, that are trying to create brand recognition and increased local usage of locally produced wood products

One aspect of the wood products economy that is growing in Massachusetts is the use of wood as an energy source. We currently have one large biomass power plant in the state and plans have been announced for developing at least three other large plants. There are also a growing number of smaller facilities that are currently using wood biomass for energy or are considering a conversion. We do not know what the economic impact will be of biomass, but the state is currently studying the potential for biomass and the infrastructure needs that will have to be met to take advantage of future markets.

The most common products produced from Massachusetts forests are sawlogs, veneer logs, firewood, pulpwood, and poles. Massachusetts sawmills produce lumber, pallet stock, dimension stock, flooring, siding, timbers, fencing, beams, and decking. Bark, wood chips, and sawdust are profitable by-products of the milling process. Outside of lumber and woodchips (which can go to pulp mills in northern New England and New York) most of the other products are sold and utilized locally.

For a directory of mills in Massachusetts, which includes a list of the products they produce, contact Gordon Boyce at 413-253-5634.



Green Certification

DCR takes next step in green certifying private lands. In January DCR received a positive environmental assessment of land enrolled in Ch61 and Forest Stewardship as well as the Bureau of Forestry's Service Forestry program conducted by an independent team of specialists representing the SmartWood Program of the Rainforest Alliance.

The Smartwood assessment team reported a number of strengths about Massachusetts current use lands, cutting practices and service forestry program. The team reported, "Implementation of forestry practices

on potential group lands within these programs is at extraordinarily high levels of quality for non-industrial, private forest lands." The assessment team noted scrupulous adherence to BMPs regarding protection of soil and water resources as well as "Exemplary consistency and effect in management planning via the Service Forestry Program.

DCR will soon begin an outreach effort to those enrolled in these programs for the opportunity to Green Certify their land.

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<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/index.htm>

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